

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende of the Netherlands and an Exchange With Reporters

July 14, 2009

President Obama. Well, let me just make a very brief statement. I am very pleased to have Prime Minister Balkenende here and his delegation. We are about to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson, on behalf of a Dutch company, exploring Manhattan and helping to lay the groundwork for the United States. And that's going to be an incredible celebration that we're all looking forward to.

With that history in mind, the United States and the Netherlands have maintained an extraordinarily close friendship for many years now. I wanted to express to the Prime Minister both the American people's appreciation for that friendship generally, but also our admiration for some of the specific international obligations that the Netherlands has taken on and the leadership that it's taken on.

We discussed the critical role that the Netherlands has played in Afghanistan as part of the ISAF operation there. The Dutch military has been one of the most outstanding militaries there, has shown extraordinary not only military capacity but also insight into the local culture and the local politics. The review that we conducted in Afghanistan that emphasized the 3 Ds of development, diplomacy, as well our ability to deploy troops effectively, that really was adopted from some strategies that had already been pursued effectively by the Netherlands.

We discussed a range of international issues that we have been working together on in the G-20. And I extended my personal invitation to the Prime Minister to participate in the next G-20 summit in Pittsburgh, because we think that the Netherlands not only is one of the world's largest economies and most active internationally, but the Prime Minister has very specific expertise and experience in working with a whole range of world leaders, and I think his contribution will be greatly appreciated.

We discussed the issue of Guantanamo and the importance of European countries working with us to assist in that process. And we're grateful for the encouragement that we've received there.

And we discussed the issue of climate change. Obviously, the Netherlands has a lot of experience in dealing with the battle against rising oceans, and they've got a deep investment in dealing with this issue. They've also taken terrific strides on issues of clean energy, and we think that we can get some good advice there, in terms of how we can work together.

So overall, we think that this partnership is strong and will continue to grow. We're grateful to the Dutch people for their extraordinary contributions to international peace and security. And I look forward to seeing you in Pittsburgh.

Prime Minister Balkenende. Thank you very much. Mr. President, I want to thank you very much for receiving us, the delegation and me here in the Oval Office. We've had a good meeting, and you already referred to the fact that we are friends for centuries, the United States and the Netherlands, some 400 years ago when Henry Hudson arrived in the area of New York, Manhattan.

And it's good to underline that we share the same values. We talk about freedom and human rights. We talk about our common responsibilities. We talk about democracy. And we both are acting worldwide.

When you started as President, you brought the message of hope and hope for a new future, and we admire you for that. I want to thank you that you are taking up your responsibilities, domestically but also internationally. We met with each other four times, at several summits, and you played an important role talking about the issues of today.

And we both are convinced that it's important that we are talking about not only the financial crisis but also about the Millennium Development Goals, about the issue of energy, climate change. So the Copenhagen summit must be successful. And therefore, it's important that we'll have a very successful meeting in Pittsburgh. And I want to thank you very much for the invitation to be there. I'm convinced that we can only solve the problems worldwide when we are working together.

And we also spoke about the issue of public health and the health system. In my country, we've had a lot of discussions, and now I know it's now on the agenda here in the United States, so it's an enormous responsibility to change things.

We also talked about the important issue of innovation and several fields of importance that we can do things in another way, innovation in the economic sphere, but also in health issues. We talked about the role of the private sector, the issue of corporate social responsibility.

So I'm convinced we have so many things in common, we can work together. You already mentioned our work in Afghanistan, a complicated and dangerous area, but we are convinced that it's important to work there together.

Mr. President, I wish you all the best with your responsibilities. It's not an easy time to be President, but you show the power and the courage to change things. And I want to thank you very much for the friendship, and I'm sure, I'm convinced, that we will work together in the right way, in the interest of the people worldwide, in the United States and in the Netherlands. And of course, you're most welcome to my beautiful country.

President Obama. Okay. Thank you very much.

All right, we're going to take one question each; representing the United States, Sam Youngman of the Hill.

Unemployment Statistics/Major League Baseball All-Star Game

Q. Good morning, Mr. President. I'm curious, sir, you've said you expect unemployment to reach 10 percent in the next month or so. How high do you expect it to get in States like Michigan, where it's already 14 percent?

And if I may, sir, I'm curious if you've been practicing your pitching ahead of tonight's game? [*Laughter*]

President Obama. Well, I think it's fair to say that I wanted to loosen up my arm a little bit. You know, my general strategy the last time I threw a pitch was at the American League Championship Series, and I just wanted to keep it high. Now, there was no clock on it; I don't know how fast it went, but if it exceeded 30 miles per hour, I'd be surprised. [*Laughter*] But it did clear the plate.

With respect to the employment issue, obviously, I don't have a crystal ball. We have looked at a lot of the economic data that's coming out right now. And as I've said repeatedly, we have seen some stabilization in the financial markets, and that's good, because that means that companies can borrow and banks are starting to lend again. Small businesses that might have worried just a couple of months ago about closing doors, they are now able to get a little more financing. That means they're less likely to lay off workers. So that's on the positive side.

What we have also seen is that historically, even after you start moving into a recovery, positive growth, hiring typically lags for some time after that. That's been the historic norm. Now, this has been a more severe recession than we've seen since the Great Depression, so how employment numbers are going to respond is not yet clear. My expectation is, is that we will probably continue to see unemployment tick up for several months. And the challenge for this administration is to make sure that even as we are stabilizing the financial system, we understand that the most important thing in the economy is, are people able to find good jobs that pay good wages.

We had a problem even before this recession, even during periods of economic growth, where the pace of job growth, wage growth, income growth was not moving as quickly as overall economic growth. The last recession that we had, the recovery was termed a "jobless recovery." We can't repeat that approach.

And that's why when I talk about things like health care reform or revamping how we approach energy and investing deeply in clean energy, when I talk about improving our education system, as I'll discuss today when I go to Michigan, those foundations are so critical because we've got to find new models of economic growth, particularly at a time when consumers are just not going—probably going to be spending as much as they were, and that has been driving a lot of the economic growth over the last several months.

Michigan, obviously, is a State that has just been battered, not only during this recession but in the years leading up to this recession. We're pleased to see that GM now and Chrysler have gotten out of bankruptcy. They have an opportunity to compete internationally. Had it not been for the steps that we took with respect to GM and Chrysler, the situation in Michigan, I think it's fair to say, would be far worse.

The same applies to the Recovery Act. We've made investments that early on have allowed a State like Michigan to lay off fewer teachers, fewer cops, fewer firefighters. Those are all jobs that would have been lost in the absence of the recovery package.

But it's still not enough, and so I would argue that the single biggest challenge that not just the United States face, but countries in Europe and all around the world are going to face as we come out of the recovery, is how do we generate enough jobs that pay good wages to keep up with population growth.

And unless we are investing in energy, infrastructure, innovation, science, development, and eliminating the drag that the health care system is placing on the overall economy, I think we will have a very difficult time generating the jobs that are necessary. If we make those investments, then I have confidence that we'll be able to do so. Okay?

Prime Minister Balkenende. [Inaudible]

The Netherlands Role in Afghanistan

Q. Mr. Obama, you mentioned the critical role that the Dutch are playing in Afghanistan. How important is it, do you think, that you will keep playing this role, even after summer next year?

President Obama. Well, as I said, I think Dutch troops have been some of the most effective troops in ISAF. I recognize that participation in the coalition in Afghanistan can be controversial in the Netherlands. It's never easy sending our finest young men and women into a field of battle.

What I shared with the Prime Minister was the hope that even after next summer that there's the ability for the Dutch to continue to apply the leadership and the experience that they've been able to accumulate over these past years.

And I think that all of us want to see an effective exit strategy where increasingly the Afghan Army, Afghan police, Afghan courts, Afghan Government are taking more responsibility for their own security. And if we can get through a successful election in September and we continue to apply the training approach to the Afghan security forces and we combine that with a much more effective approach to economic development inside Afghanistan, then my hope is, is that we will be able to begin transitioning into a different phase in Afghanistan.

The one thing I want to emphasize is that the issue in Afghanistan is not simply an American issue; it is a worldwide issue. And the vulnerabilities to terrorist attack in Europe are at least as high as they are here in the United States. If you look at how Al Qaida has operated, they consider the West to be one undifferentiated set of countries, and they will exploit whatever weaknesses are there.

So I think we have a common interest in dealing with this as effectively as possible. I'm grateful to the Prime Minister and the Dutch people for their extraordinary contribution.

Prime Minister Balkenende. It's good to underline that we are following the 3 D approach; it's always combination of defense, diplomacy, and development. We have experience on that. I'm very happy with the review of the American administration, because we can say we are exactly on the same line, so we have to go on with that.

Talking about Uruzgan—and you're aware of our decision—we will stop as lead nation in that Province, but it's also good to underline that the Netherlands will not turn its back on the Afghan people. We feel also responsibility. We will go on with—[inaudible]—cooperation. If there are requests, we will consider that seriously. That's also the way we have talked about this issue.

I also would like to underline what you said about economic issues. Last year, we talked about financial issues, the financial crisis. We talked about financial architecture. It's important that we are developing the same strategy, and I think that we have ideas enough, but now is the question of the implementation. We are working on that, and therefore, also, the summit in Pittsburgh is extremely important.

But after the financial crisis, it's also a matter of generating jobs. What do we do after the economic crisis? And therefore, also, we need to take coordinated approach.

And that's also linked to the issue of confidence: confidence among consumers, confidence among producers. And that's where it's important that we are working together and that we find the right certainty, just to give hope for people, because if people are losing their jobs, it's a terrible situation, and we are aware of the fact that we have to change things. And I

think that's also your message, that's my message, and that will also be the message of the G-20 meeting in Pittsburgh.

President Obama. Absolutely. Okay, thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

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